

## General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC) - Principle Issues and Opportunities for General Aviation (GA).

- The GAAC is made up of organisations from across General Aviation and representative of a variety of forms of aviation. All are immensely popular, are irreplaceable if lost and of great benefit to future generations. These forms include Helicopters, Ballooning, Gliding, Microlighting, Aeromodelling, Parachuting, Skydiving and UAV operation. The organisations who contribute to the GAAC boast over 50,000 members. Airshows boasted an audience of 4.2m people in 2023.
- Current Government Policy is to 'make the UK the best place in the world for GA'. We fully support that policy and see a great many ways in which to make it a reality. Acting directly on behalf of more than 50,000 people across the UK who actively participate in GA (the overall number being far larger), we aim to present both the issues which stand in the way of that policy, along with the GA communities' suggestions and solutions which will allow the Government to achieve it.
- According to Government figures General Aviation is worth around £4bn to the economy, supporting around 40,000 jobs. It is also an essential part of the wider aviation industry, where £22bn is contributed to the economy and 1 million jobs are the result. The Aviation Industry and General Aviation are indivisible - GA is the foundation on which aviation is built. Growth is predicted in all manner of different sectors of GA.
- GA Airfields used to be explicitly excluded from the definition of 'Brownfield', but in a planning policy document under the last Labour Government an error led to their omission from the definition. The Conservative Government in a Parliamentary debate stated categorically that they are Brownfield. This leaves airfields open to the challenge of development, particularly for housing and under the current Government's prioritising of Brownfield, even more so. Will the Government now remedy the situation and reinstate the explicit recognition (in the NPPF 'Glossary - Previously Developed Land') that GA Airfields are not Brownfield?
- GA airfields, as a critical part of National Infrastructure, should be recognised in Local Plan policies. Where an airfield is considered to be strategically important, will the Government require Local Planning Authorities to include a protection policy in their Local Plans? A regulated procedure does not exist for the closure of aerodromes; not the case for other forms of infrastructure, a good example being fishing ports.
- Current consultations by National Grid (NG) on two new pylon routes have not adequately considered or mitigated the risk to nearby aerodromes, many in number. The GAAC has been in extensive discussions with NG via their aviation consultants, joined in this effort by representatives from some Local Planning Authorities. This urgent issue, the subject of an ongoing statutory consultation

process, requires the urgent intervention of Government. Alternative arrangements and mitigations are available to NG.

- Across the UK existing hospital helipads have been restricted in their use. The aircraft they can serve are reduced in size or they can potentially be rendered unsafe by encroaching development. Protections for such helipads are urgently needed, and the means by which to do so will require CAA and Governmental policy changes to realise.
- GA airfields, with wide open grassed areas, are usually wildlife havens. Some airfields have very successfully enhanced biodiversity and manage the land in a highly sustainable way, for example creating rare wildflower meadows. They constitute a major resource for developers needing to identify areas to satisfy the 'biodiversity net gain' requirements that all major development sites must meet.
- STEM abounds at aerodromes, with a diverse and ever growing range of training taking place in the unique environment they provide. A great many case studies exist ranging from drone and UAV training, seen as the entry to aviation, through to flight training at all levels, including the badly needed airline pilots of tomorrow. If there is no GA, there are no future airline and commercial pilots - their training and development all takes place within the sector.
- There is a well chronicled shortage of pilots and other aviation roles to support the overall aviation industries needs in future. At the same time, GA is the only education sector that does not get tax relief on a par with other training establishments. Parity of tax relief will be simple to achieve and vital to address the shortfalls in skills and recruits. Despite this hindrance, industry has embarked on its own initiatives seeking to redress this vital issue. Government support and funding for those efforts would help ensure they are successful.
- The net VAT collected by HMRC on fuel used in flight training is just £20m. The UK's aviation training industry is renowned worldwide but competing against competition with no such encumbrance. This imbalance should be redressed.
- Business Rates have been and are increasingly a major threat to airfields. Valuation Officers often impose figures which compare with well equipped, insulated, multi use industrial units, rather than reflect the actual construction and use of aircraft hangars. These valuations do not reflect the commercial realities of income or rent derived from hangars nor the fact that most, with airside access only, cannot be used for any other purpose. This issue increases the costs on all aircraft operators, particularly flying schools.
- The Brexit Agreement lacks reciprocal arrangements with Europe which impacts on all aspects of GA with protracted processes for aircraft trading, maintenance and parts - among others. In an increasingly competitive market this needs to be addressed
- Brexit also changed the role of the CAA from an EASA compliance organisation to an independent Sovereign Regulator evolving new policies while maintaining an alignment with both European and American legislation, all of which has created a much expanded workload with a requirement for new skills. However,



the Government has not changed its funding arrangements to meet this extra burden. This urgently needs to be reviewed.

- Brexit also meant the loss of access to the EGNOS SBAS system and with it cost effective means of introducing precision approaches. The loss of access came despite significant UK technical and financial contributions, leading the previous Government to consider asking for a €1.4 bn refund on the UK investment.
- GA Airfields are at the forefront of new technology - particularly electric aircraft and those being designed to use other sustainable fuels, including hydrogen. Sustainable infrastructure, such as solar powered aircraft charging and networks already exist and are expanding, despite there being no governmental support as there is for electric vehicles in the motor industry. These developments add further reasons to the overwhelming case for the protection of existing GA airfields and aerodromes, along with Government support for these emerging technologies. They also underline the diverse nature of activities and industries which take place at aerodromes, outside the traditional purview of GA.
- The UK has an unique and important aviation heritage. Through Airshows and Air Displays, but more frequently via the sizable and well supported vintage and light aircraft organisations throughout the UK this heritage is preserved for future generations. Government assistance with matters such as the switch to lead free fuels such as UL91, training as identified above and other initiatives is vital to ensure that our heritage is not lost.

**GA is an industry that wants to work with the Government to meet the policy of making the UK the best place in the world for GA, and to continue to inspire the badly needed future generations of pilots and aviation professionals.**

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